

CULT PROSTITUTION IN NEW TESTAMENT EPHESUS: A REAPPRAISAL

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is widely held that cult prostitution in connection with fertility rites was commonly practiced throughout the NT world. This idea seems so clearly established in the minds of many people as to need little proof. The current of NT scholarly opinion seems to flow inexorably in this direction, which lends the idea of Greco-Roman cult prostitution weighty authority. For instance, Everett Ferguson, whose scholarly work deserves high regard, writes:

All kinds of immoralities were associated with the [Greco-Roman] gods. Not only was prostitution a recognized institution, but through the influence of the fertility cults of Asia Minor, Syria, and Phoenicia it became a part of the religious rites at certain temples. Thus there were one thousand “sacred prostitutes” at the temple of Aphrodite at Corinth.¹

Notice that Ferguson interprets the origin of cult prostitution “at certain temples” to have been inspired by fertility practices in the East. Such cult prostitution is familiar to students of the Ancient Near East (ANE) as part of the OT world, so it would seem logical that such practices could move around the Mediterranean down through the centuries into the Hellenistic and Roman cities.

On closer inspection, however, this explanation starts to unravel. To begin with, scholars are now wondering if the phenomenon in the ANE and OT was really cult prostitution as part of fertility rites. Karel van der Toorn in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, for instance, reports: “In recent years, however, the widely accepted hypothesis of cultic prostitution has been seriously challenged. Various scholars have argued that the current view rests on unwarranted assumptions, doubtful anthropological premises, and very little evidence.”² After a brief survey of the evidence, van der Toorn concludes, “In short, both the evidence from the OT and the Akkadian and Ugaritic data do not support the hypothesis of ‘cultic prostitution.’”³ Van der Toorn does find

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¹ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 64. All abbreviations of ancient literature in this essay are those used in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3d ed. (*OCD*).

² “Cultic Prostitution,” *ABD* 5.510.

³ *ABD* 5.512.

“prostitution that was profitable to, and at times organized by, the temple and its administration,” but “there is no need to postulate the existence of sacred prostitution in the service of a fertility cult.”⁴

In this light, we are justified in asking for a re-examination of the issue of cult prostitution in the NT world as well. If the supposed ANE and OT ancestry of fertility cult prostitution has been called into question, might not the Greco-Roman derivative have “unwarranted assumptions, doubtful anthropological premises, and very little evidence” as well? It is worth noting that the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* where van der Toorn wrote has no discussion of either cultic or secular prostitution in the NT world. Perhaps the editors could not find enough material for an article?

But to take on the question of cult prostitution in the whole Greco-Roman world might appear to be far too broad of a question for a single essay. With this in mind I will aim here for a more humble goal: to survey and to briefly consider the only ancient evidence commonly cited for the existence of cult prostitution in the Greek world. No one posits cult prostitution in Rome or Italy, so we will not discuss it directly.⁵ Then we will look more deeply into the religious practices of Pauline Ephesus, where cult prostitution has particularly been thought to have flourished. Our conclusion will be that cult prostitution did not exist in Ephesus, and hopefully the implication that it did not correspondingly exist in other Greek cities will also at least be suggested if not definitively proven.

To prove the existence of something requires only that one invoke credible ancient sources properly interpreted. This is a relatively easy task which does not always require detailed knowledge of the sources. However, to prove the *non-existence* of something in antiquity requires direct and intimate familiarity with ancient people and societies and with ancient sources. It does not satisfy the skeptical reader to simply point out that no ancient sources exist which attest to the practice in that place or in that time. For this reason, I am providing some relevant material in translation to help the reader get some sense of what the priestesses of ancient Ephesus were actually like.

Before going further, let us define cult prostitution. It can be defined narrowly as union with a prostitute (whether with a female or a male makes no difference) for exchange of money or goods, which was sanctioned by the wardens of a deity whether in temple precincts or elsewhere as a sacred act of worship. In such cases, the prostitute had semi-official status as a cult functionary, either on a permanent or temporary basis, and the sexual union is usually interpreted to have been part of a fertility ritual. More generally, cult prostitution could simply refer to acts of prostitution where the money or goods received went to a temple and to its administrators. In this latter case, the prostitutes would be slaves owned by the temple.⁶ Neither the

⁴ *ABD* 5.510, 512.

⁵ Cf. “Prostitution, Sacred,” in *OCD* 1264 for the sale of slaves which could wrongly be thought to refer to cult prostitution in Locri Epizephyrii in S. Italy.

⁶ Van der Toorn (*ABD* 5.510) writes: “When speaking of cultic prostitution, scholars normally refer to religiously legitimated intercourse with strangers in or in the vicinity of the sanctuary. It had a ritual character and was organized or at least condoned by the priesthood, as a means to increase fecundity and fertility. There is, however, another, more restricted way in which one can

broader or narrower form of cult prostitution is in evidence in ancient Ephesus nor, may I suggest, in other Greek (or Roman) cities of the NT era.

Let it be underlined that we are not here discussing erotic symbolism or even possible sexual acts connected to mystery religions or fertility cults. "There is no doubt," says Walter Burkert, "that sexuality was prominent in mysteries."⁷ Burkert goes on to explain, however, that the rituals were probably only *symbolic* rather than actual sexual acts.⁸ And either way, this is not *cult prostitution* in either of the two senses defined above. Rather, a mystery initiate experienced some symbolic act in company with other initiates, perhaps even with his or her spouse (Plutarch, *Mor.* 611D), but not with cult prostitutes. For this reason, we will not be dealing with cult sexual symbolism in the pagan world of the NT era. This is simply another issue.

II. STRABO AND CORINTH

The source most often used to substantiate Greek cult prostitution in the NT era is a statement in the Greek travel-writer, Strabo (ca. 64 BC–AD 21), regarding ancient Corinth. He writes: "And the temple of Aphrodite [in Corinth] was so rich that it owned more than a thousand temple-slaves, courtesans (*hetairai*), whom both women and men had dedicated to the goddess. And therefore it was also on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich" (8.6.20; LCL trans.).

One can clearly hear echoes of Strabo's statement in the quote from Everett Ferguson above. Ferguson does reference Strabo in a footnote here as his only source as follows: "Strabo 8.6.20, referring to classical times; 8.6.21 on Roman times only mentions a 'small temple of Aphrodite.' It is possible that the statement about classical times is incorrect, arising from Strabo misunderstanding information about the dedication of figurines to Aphrodite as a reference to women who served at her temple."⁹ In other words, the only source which Ferguson cites for the practice of cult prostitution in the NT world is dubious even to him, and properly so.

As with writers ancient and modern, Strabo is not immune to critical evaluation as an historical source. For instance, in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Nicholas Purcell writes that "in searching for detailed information [Strabo] retails long passages of by then out-of-date description, which can make the interpretation of his evidence very hazardous."¹⁰ Hence, we must

speak of cultic prostitution. We may use the term to call attention to the fact that the money or the goods which the prostitutes received went to the temple funds." In general, see also: "Prostitution, Sacred," in *OCD* 1263–1264; "Prostitution, Sakrale," *Kleine Pauly* 4.1192; W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1985) 158, 408, n. 9; cf. 108–109.

⁷ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge and London: Harvard, 1987) 104; see pp. 104–108 for general discussion of the issue.

⁸ "It is symbolism that shapes the more durable forms of ritual, not the 'real' orgies," Burkert, *Mystery Cults* 106. We are also not concerned with statements found in many ancient authors describing sexual relations as "fulfilling the mysteries of Aphrodite." This is simply a euphemism, not evidence of sacred prostitution or of an actual act of worship.

⁹ Ferguson, *Backgrounds* 64 n. 15.

¹⁰ "Strabo," *OCD* 1447; cf. "Strabon," *Kl. Pauly* 5.381–385.

resist the urge to take Strabo's reference to ancient cult prostitution in Corinth as *prima facie* evidence for Corinth of the NT era. There are further reasons to question this source.¹¹

Strabo in the passage in question (8.6.20) was reporting on "cult prostitution" in the distant past in Corinth, namely in the reign of the tyrant Cypselus (657–25 BC; 8.6.20, see line 23 in the Loeb ed.). Note that in Strabo's statement, he refers to the phenomenon as something in the past: "The temple of Aphrodite *was* so wealthy that it *owned* more than a thousand slaves as prostitutes who *had been devoted*. . . ." Strabo obviously did not intend to present the practice as one still in existence in the Augustan era, particularly since he observed a few paragraphs later that Corinth possessed only a "small shrine of Aphrodite" in his day, rather than the wealthy and powerful temple of earlier centuries (8.6.21; cf. Pausanias 2.4.7).

If we ask what exactly Strabo was referring to in ancient Corinth, we would be hard pressed to fit the prostitution so described as fitting our narrow definition of cult prostitution. He states that the temple of Aphrodite owned slave-prostitutes whom both men and women had devoted to the goddess. Strabo does not say that the *hetairai* conducted their transactions on sacred property nor that their trade was considered to be part of mystical or sacred rites. The *hetairai*—again, granting that Strabo reports an historical phenomenon—would have been slaves owned by the temple as a monetary resource to enrich the temple and the city. This was not a part of any ritual activity. Furthermore, some scholars believe that the act of devoting the *hetairai* to the goddess here may only be a reference to fictive purchase of their freedom by the deity—hence it may not have been cult prostitution at all in even the broadest possible sense.¹²

And even if we were to accept Strabo's testimony that Corinth did have cult prostitution in the seventh century BC—which cannot be automatically granted—there is good reason to have serious doubts that it survived into the first century AD. Greek Corinth, as is well known, was destroyed by L. Mummius in 146 BC (e.g. Strabo 8.6.23), and re-founded in 44 BC as a Roman colony by Julius Caesar with a distinctly Roman character. Hence, as David Gill observes, "It is right for both classical archaeologists and New Testament scholars to stress the Roman nature of the city which was visited

¹¹ See also H. Conzelmann, "Korinth und die Mädchen der Aphrodite. Zur Religionsgeschichte der Stadt Korinth," *NAG* 8 (1967) 247–261; J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1983) 56–58; G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 2–3 [Fee cites the previous works on p. 3 n. 6]; cf. Bruce W. Winter, "Gluttony and Immorality at Élitist Banquets: The Background to 1 Corinthians 6:12–20," *Jian Dao* 7 (1997) 77–90; esp. p. 78. Winter's thesis is that the Christians who were having relations with prostitutes in 1 Cor 6:12–20 were not going to brothels—this was happening at private banquets (*symposia*). He is undoubtedly correct since the use of *hetairai* on such occasions was a universal Greek custom. Furthermore, the use of one's own slave(s) as *hetairai* was also common, or even owning and keeping a *hetaira* in common with others was common enough (e.g. Demosthenes, *Against Neaira*). For these practices see S. M. Baugh, "The Family in Greek Society," in *Marriage and Family in the Ancient World* (ed. K. Campbell; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, forthcoming).

¹² So Simon Pembroke in *OCD* 1264.

by Paul in the first century AD.¹³ Or as the second-century mythographer and travel-writer Pausanias puts it: “Not one of the Corinthians of antiquity still lives in Corinth; instead there are colonists sent from Rome” (2.1.2). What this means for us is a presumption that the cult practices of ancient Greek Corinth had been radically altered by the *Romanitas* of its new population. And this is what Pausanias reports: “Since the Romans devastated Corinth and the ancient Corinthians perished, the old local sacrifices are no longer a tradition” (2.3.6).

In his own critique of Corinthian cult prostitution from this passage in Strabo, Jerome Murphy-O’Connor adds this point: “Were Strabo correct, Corinth would be unique among the cities of Greece. Sacred prostitution was never a Greek custom and, were Corinth an exception, the silence of all other ancient authors becomes impossible to explain.”¹⁴ In my opinion, Murphy-O’Connor is quite correct in saying that “[s]acred prostitution was never a Greek custom.” However, there is a statement in another ancient author as well as two other passages in Strabo which should be mentioned.

III. CULT PROSTITUTION ELSEWHERE

The only author beside Strabo to mention cult prostitution at Corinth is “the somewhat greasy heap of a literary rag-and-bone picker” by name of Athenaeus (ca. AD 200). One of his characters in a symposium discusses the prominence of *hetairai* in Corinth (13.573b–574c).¹⁵ It is important to note that this discourse on prostitutes has them participating in Corinthian public sacrifices to Aphrodite which is expressed as something quite exceptional. And indeed it was. Participation in the state cults of any Greek city required one to be a free citizen of that city. There were often severe penalties for participation by outsiders of any sort, and that would include women caught in adultery or *hetairai*. For instance, in Demosthenes’ speech, *Against Neaira*, Neaira was a Corinthian-born (secular!) *hetaira* whose daughter participated in state rituals “not even to be named” at Athens, which called for extreme punitive measures.

The line of interest for cult prostitution in Athenaeus is when his character says, “Even private citizens [of Corinth] vow to the goddess [Aphrodite] that, if those things for which they make petition are fulfilled, they will even render courtesans (*hetairai*) to her” (13.573e). It is not exactly clear what “rendering” (*ἀπάγειν*) a *hetaira* entails. It could mean the sale of the slave and rendering the money to the temple. Or it could mean the sale of the *hetaira* to the temple itself (manumission through fictive divine ownership?), or some other practice. Beyond this, Athenaeus gives us no real clue, and the evidence here does not

¹³ D. W. J. Gill, “Corinth: A Roman Colony in Achaia,” *BZ* 37/2 (1993) 259–264; quotation from p. 264.

¹⁴ Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth* 57.

¹⁵ The characterization of Athenaeus comes from the preface to the Loeb edition of his *Deipnosophistae* (“Table Talk”). And it is clear that Athenaeus’s knowledge of various customs is derivative and unfiltered gossip or literary snippets. He hardly serves as a stable historical source.

demand cult prostitution as defined above. Prostitutes were regularly regarded as devotees of Aphrodite in Greek literature, but that does not make them *cult prostitutes* per se.

It is in light of the last point that we should read Strabo's other reference to *hetairai* both at Corinth and in Comana Pontica who were considered to be "sacred to Aphrodite" (12.3.36).¹⁶ Strabo describes Comana as a "lesser Corinth" because of the great multitudes of prostitutes found there who drew "great numbers on holiday."¹⁷ Whether we can call these Comanian women cult prostitutes is not immediately certain.

At the very least, we should point out that Comana in Pontus was hardly in the center of the Hellenic world and hardly represents Greek cult practices. It was more likely under Armenian influence (it neighbored Armenia Minor) where Strabo reports on cult prostitution which does fit our narrow definition. He writes:

Now the sacred rites of the Persians, one and all, are held in honour by both the Medes and the Armenians; but those of Anaitis are held in exceptional honour by the Armenians, who have built temples in her honour in different places, and especially in Acilisene. Here they dedicate to her service male and female slaves. This, indeed, is not a remarkable thing; but the most illustrious men of the tribe actually consecrate to her their daughters while maidens; and it is the custom for these first to be prostituted in the temple of the goddess for a long time and after this to be given in marriage; and no one disdains to live in wedlock with such a woman. Something of this kind is told also by Herodotus in his account of the Lydian woman, who, one and all, he says, prostitute themselves (11.14.16; LCL trans.).¹⁸

There are three important observations about this passage. First, Strabo is describing cult prostitution in *Armenia*, which he also regards as customary in Persia. This is not the *Greek* world which we are discussing. If the citizens of Acilisene practiced this custom of prostituting their daughters before marriage, it does not relate to Greek (or Roman) cult practices. Secondly, Strabo explicitly cites Herodotus as his source for Lydian (and probably Persian) cult prostitution. To evaluate Herodotus's "often hilarious" account of Babylonian cult prostitution (Simon Pembroke) also takes us outside the geographical and temporal boundaries of our essay. And we are also not going to examine the historical veracity of Strabo's report on Acilisene cult prostitution for the same reason.

Finally, Strabo's attitude toward the cult prostitution of the daughters of the Armenian nobles comes through quite clearly in his description: he thinks it bizarre. If this sort of thing were encountered in the Greek and Roman world of his day—and Strabo himself traveled widely—we would not expect Strabo to be shocked at the Armenian cult practice. In particular notice that

¹⁶ Comana Pontica was in northeast Asia Minor not far from Strabo's hometown, Amasia.

¹⁷ I should note that in this passage in book 12 as he had in the earlier place in book 8, Strabo shifts to the past tense when describing *hetairai* in the service of Corinthian Aphrodite. It is presented as something obsolete in his day.

¹⁸ Herodotus 1.199; cf. 1.93 in Babylon which OT and ANE scholars are now doubting; cf. also Lucian, "The Goddess of Syria" 6. Since this is far outside the time and locale of the NT world, it will draw no further comment here.

he finds it remarkable that the girls, once prostituted in service of a cult, were married off. And it was even more remarkable to him that “no one disdains to live in wedlock with such a woman.”¹⁹ This last point will be revisited later.

This concludes our broader survey of Greek cult prostitution. We have looked at all the main ancient sources for the supposed practice and come away skeptical.²⁰ If we were to look further into the issue more broadly, we could sample some of the abundant material on *hetairai* and concubines in antiquity. We will not do so here; however, I will simply report that these sources do not mention *cult* prostitution, which is a significant lacuna.²¹ We will, though, look in greater detail now at one particular locale where cult prostitution is widely thought today to have existed, Pauline Ephesus.

IV. SACRED PROSTITUTION AT EPHEBUS

Many people today think that cult prostitution was practiced in Pauline Ephesus. This is an innocuous opinion in some cases, but in others it has far-reaching implications for the interpretation of 1 Tim 2:9–15 in particular, a text of central importance in the current discussion on the ordination of women to the pastoral office.

Before proceeding, let me point out that neither Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Dio Chrysostom, Pausanias, Xenophon of Ephesus, Achilles Tatius, nor any other ancient author speaks explicitly or even hints at cult prostitution in either the narrow or broad sense in Ephesus of any period. Nor is it evidenced in the nearly 4,000 extant Greek and Latin inscriptions from Ephesus. This is an opinion found only in modern writers.

As only one example, Sharon Hodgkin Gritz, in the published version of her doctoral dissertation on 1 Tim 2:9–15 makes the following statement in connection with the worship of the chief goddess of Ephesus, Artemis Ephesia:

Multitudes of priestesses ministered in the religion of Artemis. . . . These women came to the temple as virgins, dedicated to the service of Artemis. They worked under the superintendence of the chief eunuch, the Megabyzus. Did these priestesses function as temple prostitutes or did they retain their virginity?²² Scholars appeared divided on this issue. Some contended that the cultic rites at the Artemision did not include sacred prostitution. . . . Others, however, asserted that ceremonial prostitution did exist at Ephesus.²³

¹⁹ We do read about *hetairai* marrying in the Greek world, but it was not “respectable” marriage by either Greek or Roman norms; e.g. Demosthenes, *Against Neaira* again; a dedication of three *hetairai* at their marriage in the *Greek Anthology* 6.208; or the notorious case of Pericles, tyrant in classical Athens, who kept a Milesian *hetaira* named Aspasia [*q.v.* in *OCD*].

²⁰ See “Prostitution, Sacred” in the *OCD* for a few other possible sources (“reported only from the margins of the Greek world”), which do not convince Simon Pembroke, the writer of the *OCD* entry, that cult prostitution is evidenced as a Greco-Roman practice.

²¹ See the helpful overview by Jennifer A. Glancy, “Obstacles to Slaves’ Participation in the Corinthian Church,” *JBL* 117 (1998) 481–501. There are a number of essays on prostitutes by ancient authors (e.g. Lucian), though it is not edifying reading.

²² This seems a strange way to put the question. The alternative to cult prostitution should be something like: “. . . or did they engage in worship acts which did not involve sexual activities.”

²³ S. Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9–15 in Light of the Religious and Cultural Milieu of the First Century* (Lanham, New York and London: University Press of America, 1991) 39–40.

To this point, Gritz has only reviewed the opinion of previous writers. In the next paragraph, she decides the issue to her own satisfaction as follows:

Even if the priestesses of Artemis were virgins, there existed elements of sexual impurity in her festivals. Also, one could question the ancient sources which gave evidence of the virginity of these priestesses. How did these view the concept of virginity? As the Mother Goddess herself, priestesses could serve in temple rites without preserving their chastity and still be considered “virgins” or “sacred” simply because they had not married. This argument found support in the fact that “einer verheirateten Frau bei Todesstrafe verboten war, den Temple zu betreten.”²⁴ Contemporary writers would not have perceived temple harlotry as impure or immoral because it had an accepted sacred function. Some form of temple prostitution probably did exist in Ephesus even if with limitations.²⁵

For Gritz, this all relates to Paul’s prohibition of women teachers and elders (1 Tim 2:11–15) in that he refers only to the *Ephesian* women, because “undoubtedly, some of the new Christian converts had once been cultic priestesses” and were therefore unstable sorts who were loaded down with “guilty memories of ‘sacred’ sexual misconduct.”²⁶

The scenario just depicted might seem quite plausible in abstract, but, unfortunately, it has almost nothing to do with ancient Ephesus. In fact, if one removes the historical errors from the material supporting Gritz’s conclusions, very little remains except modern fancy. She refers to “ancient sources” but cites none.

²⁴ This statement comes from a well-known essay by Gerhard Seiterle, “Artemis—die grosse Göttin von Ephesos,” *Antike Welt* 10 (1979) 6. This bit quoted and the immediately preceding context reads (I translate): “It appears that the *Kuretes* were no longer located in the precincts of the Artemisium in Roman times, but were accommodated in the Prytaneion in the upper city-market area from where they supervised the cultus. The strict demand for maidenhood (*Jungfräulichkeit*) inside the sacred area had as a consequence that a married woman was forbidden from entering the temple on pain of death.” (*Kuretes* were important civic officials with supervisory powers over the Artemisium. This temple was located about one mile northeast outside the city, whereas the public Prytaneion building was on the southeast edge of the city proper. So the two buildings were some considerable distance apart, roughly two miles.)

I should note that Seiterle’s statement is not without its own problems. First, he says that married women could not enter the *temple*, but the source of this alleged custom is the (I or II AD?) Alexandrian novelist, Achilles Tatius, who says that no free woman (only maidens and slave-girls) could enter the *naos* (“inner shrine”) which was located inside the temple (*Clitophon and Leucippe* 7.13). Granting this, it is perfectly reasonable to think that married women could have served as regular priestesses of Artemis in the outer parts of the temple and in cultic activities elsewhere (e.g. the altar of Artemis on the Procession Way—see D. Knibbe and Iplikcioglu, “Neue Inschriften aus Ephesos IX, *JÖAI* 55 [1984] 120–121 for the priest, Apollonius Politicus, who set it up). But secondly, this custom is of debatable authenticity anyway. Achilles Tatius himself says that it was observed “in ancient times” (*to palaion*) implying that it was no longer in force in his day. Frankly, I think the whole thing is just an exotic tidbit of fiction which served Tatius’s plot line—so typical in these romantic novels.

²⁵ Gritz, *Mother Goddess* 40.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 116. Virtually the same interpretation is upheld by other writers; e.g. Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 70 and 98. For a review of this work see S. M. Baugh, “The Apostle Among the Amazons,” *WTJ* 56 (1994) 153–171.

I am not interested in conducting a critique of Gritz's work here.²⁷ I have simply presented her statements as typical of the popular notion about sacred prostitution in ancient Ephesus. Gritz herself has not contributed anything original on this specific point; she shows no evidence in her notes or bibliography of having consulted any ancient primary source of any sort in this connection. Instead, her belief in Ephesian cult prostitution is clearly derived from a writer named Camden Cobern whom she paraphrases and cites.²⁸

Cobern's contribution to the topic of Ephesian cult prostitution is limited to these two sentences: "The head of the temple hierarchy [at Ephesus] was the Megabyzus, or chief priest, who was probably a Persian. A multitude of priestesses, who came as virgins to the temple, were dedicated to prostitution in the temple's service."²⁹ This was written in 1917, when the Ephesian epigraphical evidence was still quite fresh and undigested (and a considerable store has been unearthed since then). But what is most remarkable, is that Cobern himself makes this passing judgment on Ephesian priestesses of Artemis *with no citation of ancient evidence in its support*. There is a footnote, but in it Cobern merely remarks how his opinion relates to that of a contemporary writer.³⁰

In other words, what appears to be a scholarly consensus on ancient Ephesus, is actually an unsubstantiated passing comment from one author. This has made the various statements today particularly difficult to critique. For instance, Sharon Gritz asserts that "there existed elements of sexual impurity" in the festivals of Artemis Ephesia. However, without citation of ancient sources for this statement, how can one either confirm or deny that ancient references to these festivals have been properly interpreted? We can only guess, particularly when experts in the field know of no such sexual elements.³¹

²⁷ We could easily ask some pretty hard questions about this book and its arguments (especially given its subtitle). For example, "Contemporary writers would not have perceived temple harlotry as impure or immoral because it had an accepted sacred function" (p. 40). This begs the question by assuming that "temple harlotry" did exist for contemporary authors (like Paul) to ignore! If it did not exist, they would be silent about it also. But, indeed, no ancient author could have held his tongue about cult prostitution. Writers like Strabo, Pliny the Elder, or Pausanias were vastly inquisitive travelers who reported any curious thing they ran across—and a lot of incurious things as well! But they are silent about cult prostitutes at Ephesus (or elsewhere, except for the bit in Strabo already discussed).

²⁸ Gritz does cite two other modern works in her footnote (p. 48, n. 86), but both are popular rather than scholarly works working with ancient sources; they both simply cite and rely solely upon Coburn's book for the supposed Ephesian cult practices. Hence, Cobern is really the only secondary source in the end.

²⁹ Camden M. Cobern, *New Archeological Discoveries* (2d ed.; New York & London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1917) 465.

³⁰ Cobern's note reads: "Dr. Percy Gardner, *The Ephesian Gospel*, 1915, believes that altho [*sic*] at Babylon the temple of Artemis was a seat of prostitution, at Ephesus, through Greek influence, her worship was conducted 'in far less repulsive guise.' Yet he admits that there were 'elements of sexual impurity' in her festivals where crowds of priestesses performed 'orgiastic dances' in her honor." But again, these are unsubstantiated claims all around and contrary to the ancient evidence we will discuss.

³¹ E.g. Richard Oster whose works I cite below.

On the other hand, there is a way to critique the ideas under consideration, but it involves some reading and technical evaluation of ancient sources (this is why the footnotes in the works of ancient historians are often so ponderous). It is not my intent to conduct a full review of all the evidence here, but hopefully enough will be given and briefly discussed to provide a more accurate picture of Artemis Ephesia and her priestesses. The reader interested in a further discussion will be referred to other works in the footnotes.

1. *Artemis Ephesia*. First, it may be recalled, the popular tradition about Artemis of Pauline Ephesus reported above relies heavily on the notion that she was a manifestation of the mother goddess and hence, a fertility goddess—though, in fact, the two are not necessarily the same (witness Aphrodite and Demeter in the Greek pantheon). This seems to make the idea of sacred prostitution in her service more plausible to the modern mind. But it is a highly debatable picture of the goddess at the time of Paul, and one with which I personally do not agree.

It is possibly true that the original settlers of ancient Ephesus (well over 1,000 years before Paul) found and adopted an Anatolian goddess whom they transmuted into Artemis Ephesia. Her famous cult statue may reflect that ancestry, but we have clear evidence that in the Hellenistic and Roman era, this ancestry was intentionally downplayed by the Ephesian sacred officials in charge of her cultus (the Megabyzos was extinct by Paul's day, by the way).

The ancient Ephesians themselves presented Artemis Ephesia to the world as the traditional tomboy huntress who stood for chastity and the rejection of marriage.³² What we find in the abundant evidence on coins, statues, inscriptions, literature, etc. around the time of Paul is an Artemis who was the traditional Greek maiden (virgin) goddess, decked out for the hunt with her quiver and bow and dogs by her side. One authority on ancient Ephesus calls the view of Artemis as "a multi-breasted fertility goddess" a "gross misunderstanding" because of "the paucity of ancient evidence that supports the idea."³³ What positive evidence we do possess about Artemis, "the unbroken virgin" (Homer, *Od.* 6.109), of this period has been sketched out elsewhere, so I will not repeat it here.³⁴ However, it is extensive enough to warrant the conclusion that Artemis Ephesia was not seen as a mother or fertility goddess in Paul's day, nor had she been for many centuries previously if at all.

³² The Greeks regarded rejection of marriage as priggish and unnatural as evidenced in the cruel fate of the devotee of Artemis, Hippolytus; cf. Euripides's play by that name. In Greek mythology, Artemis was repelled by sexual contact of any kind; e.g. her vengeance on Acteon after stumbling across her while bathing or on one of her nymphs after she was raped by Zeus; cf. Ovid, *Met.* 2.430 ff. and 3.140 ff.

³³ Richard Oster, "The Ephesian Artemis as an Opponent of Early Christianity," *JAC* 19 (1976) 24–44; quotations from p. 28.

³⁴ Richard Oster, "Ephesus as a Religious Center under the Principate, I. Paganism before Constantine," *ANRW* II.18.3 (1990) 1661–1728; esp. pp. 1699–1728; and S. M. Baugh, "A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century," *Women and the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in Its Literary, Cultural, and Theological Contexts* (ed. A. J. Köstenberger, T. R. Schreiner and S. Baldwin; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 13–52; esp. pp. 28–32.

And even if the experts are wrong and Artemis Ephesia was indeed conceived of as a mother goddess in antiquity, this would not *ipso facto* mean that cult prostitutes served her. Remember that Strabo thought it was the goddess of love and the patron goddess of prostitutes, Aphrodite, who had prostitutes devoted to her in antique Corinth. It was not the traditional Greek mother goddess, Demeter (or Ma, Meter, Cybele, etc.). Nor was it Artemis.

Secondly, although we keep reading about “orgiastic rites” attached to the worship of Artemis of Ephesus in modern authors, I have yet to find out what they are talking about or any trace of such in the ancient sources. The cult practices of Artemis Ephesia evidenced in our sources are the standard, relatively innocent corporate activities found in Greek state cults: feasts, festivals and public sacrifices (*IvE* 24), banquets (*IvE* 951; Strabo, 14.1.20), processions (*IvE* 1577; Xenophon Ephesius, *Ephesian Story*, Book 1), and contests of athletes, actors and musicians at the Great Artemisia and at other sacred games in Artemis’s honor (e.g. *IvE* 1081–1160).³⁵ There was, of course, the birthday celebration of the goddess which Strabo mentions (14.1.20), but despite all attempts to make this holiday bash “orgiastic,” it was a relatively staid public festival centering on the goddess’s nativity scene involving *male* public officials (*Kuretes*), not cult prostitutes or priestesses at all.³⁶

2. *The Priestesses of Artemis Ephesia.* That is enough of a review of the problems with the received tradition. It is time to look for ourselves at some of the best direct evidence we have for the priestesses of Artemis. I submit the following translated Ephesian inscriptions for your consideration with interpretation to follow. This comprises most of the extant inscriptions; the few others are fragmentary or have only passing references to priestesses of Artemis, but they fit the same pattern to be discussed.³⁷

1. “The Peoples in Asia honored the mo[ther?] of Chaeremon, Kallinoe who was appointed Priestess of Artemis by the People of the Ephesians” (*IvE* 615A; late I BC?). (Kallinoe’s appointment is specially noted because she was not an Ephesian, but probably from Tralles where this inscription was found.)

³⁵ The abbreviation *IvE* refers to the standard collection of inscriptions from Ephesus: ed. Wankel et al., *Die Inschriften von Ephesos* (Bonn, 1979–84). For processions, see especially Dieter Knibbe, “*Via Sacra Ephesiaca*: New Aspects of the Cult of Artemis Ephesia,” in *EPHESOS: Metropolis of Asia* (ed. H. Koester; Valley Forge: Trinity, 1995) 141–155; and Hilke Thür, “The Processional Way in Ephesus as a Place of Cult and Burial,” *ibid.* 157–187; Guy M. Rogers, *The Sacred Identity of Ephesos* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

³⁶ See especially Oster, “Ephesus as a Religious Center” 1706–1713; and Baugh, “Foreign World” 25–26. The office of *Kuretes* at Ephesus was a high public office with a supervisory role over the Artemisium. Traditionally, the term refers to semi-divine, armed youths who occupy remote mountain regions; *q.v.* Apostolos Athanassakis, *The Orphic Hymns* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1977) nos. 31 and 38. Hence, the birthday celebration of Artemis Ephesia was conducted on the hill outside town (Ortygia). They were not female priestesses at all, much less cult prostitutes.

³⁷ The translations are mine from the Greek originals. Note that I have not indicated lacunae and reconstructed readings with brackets, subscripted dots, etc. as is normal in a critical edition. All the readings here, though, are quite certain.

2. "In the prytany of Vedia Marcia, the daughter of Publius, Priestess (of Artemis) and High Priestess of Asia" (*IvE* 1017; AD 93–100).
3. "Helvidia Paula, daughter of Publius, Priestess of Artemis" (made some donation) (*IvE* 492; ca. AD 89/90).
4. "Claudia Trophime, daughter of Philippos and Melisse, Priestess and Prytanis, erected (a statue)" (*IvE* 508; AD 92/3).
5. "Ulpia Euodia Mudiane the Priestess of Artemis, daughter of Mudianus and of Euodia the descendant of (Upius) Strato and (daughter) of Dionisius, whose family often held the office of Priestess and *Kosmeteira*, sister of Ulpia Strato the *Kosmeteira*, performed the rites and made all the expenses through her parents" (*IvE* 989). (The office of *Kosmeteira* [κοσμήτειρα] as its etymology from κόσμος ["adornment"] suggests, probably involved the adornment of the cult statue of Artemis as was common in the worship of Greek goddesses.)
6. "Ulpia Junilla, Priestess, daughter of the Incredible Ulpus Trophimus and of U[lpia?] Agathemeris, completed her term as Priestess with piety and decorum. In the prytany of Julia Polla" (*IvE* 989A). (Cf. *IvE* 980 [#20 below] and 3034 for Julia Polla who was also a Priestess and *Kosmeteira*.)
7. "The Council and People honored Vipsania Olympias, daughter of Lucius Vipsanius Apelleus, son of Neo of the Cornelian tribe, and of Claudia Pythos, the daughter of Polemonis, completed her term as Priestess of Artemis as befits a sacred office, fulfilling both the rites and sacrifices worthily; she wreathed the shrine (*naos*) and all its precincts in the days of the goddess's manifestations, making the public sacrifices and the distributions (of money) to the State Council and to the Council of Elders (*Gerousia*), and bestowing in addition for repairs the sum of 5,000 imperial (*basilike*) denarii. She served her priestly term during the prytany of Gaius Licinnius Dionysodorus" (*IvE* 987; I AD?).
8. *IvE* 988 reads the same as *IvE* 987 (#7) in honor of Vipsania Polla, the stepsister (?) of Vipsania Olympias; although the inscription is badly filled with lacunae, it is reliably reconstructed.
9. "To Good Fortune. Hordeonia Pulchra, Priestess and *Kosmeteira*, daughter of P. Hordeonius Lollianus the Sophist and of Antonia Quintilia; she completed her service as Priestess in the prytany of Gaius Terentius Veratius" (*IvE* 984; early II century).
10. Another Priestess, the daughter of Flavia Meltine, whose name is lost from the stone "[made] all the distributions of her priesthood and gave to the city 5,000 denarii, they—namely Flavia Meltine her mother, daughter of Maior, and Maior her grandfather, and Maior the Younger her uncle—gave it to the city from their own funds" (*IvE* 997).
11. The donation required of the priestesses was established by decree of the Ephesian Council [*boule*] itself: "(name lost) [. . .] served as Priestess of Artemis piously and generously, and zealously supplied all that which was to be given to the city to the sum of 5,000 denarii in accordance with the Council's measure, and she furthermore gave the customary distri-

- butions. T(itus) Aulus Priscus, the secretary and imperial freedman, her foster father, set up this honor” (Knibbe et al., “Neue Inschriften aus Ephesos XI,” *JÖAI* 59 [1989] 163–237; no. 8, p. 176; ca. AD 165).
12. “Stlaccia Sabina, Priestess, daughter of Lucius (Stlaccius) Cer(v)ius Pollio and of Confulia Sabina, in the prytany of Dionysodorus” (*IvE* 999A).
 13. “. . . Priestess Hordeonia Paulina, daughter of Aulus Hordeonius Saturninus, son of Aulus of the tribe Falerna, and (daughter) of Nikator in the prytany of Marcus S[. . .]” (*IvE* 981; early II cent.).
 14. “The State Council and People honored Antonia Juliane the Priestess of Artemis, daughter of the emperor-loving M. Antonius Barus and of Flavia Tertulla. This honor was erected by Hostius Metrodorus the Prytanis and by Aelius Ceionius the Secretary of the People” (*IvE* 982; late II century).
 15. “Julia Pantima Potentilla, Priestess and *Kosmeteira* of Artemis, daughter of Julius Artemas, Asiarch and Prytanis, and Secretary of the People, who completed all (his) offices and liturgies and an embassy to the Emperor, Antoninus [and] Commodus . . .” (*IvE* 983; AD 177–180).
 16. “The State Council and People of the First and Greatest Metropolis of Asia, Ephesus, and Twice Temple-Warden of the Emperor Cults, Larcia Theogenis Juliane the Prytanis and Gymnasiarch of all the gymnasia and Priestess of our Lady Artemis, daughter of Aulus Larcus Hiero Julianus the Prytanis and Gymnasiarch of all the gymnasia and Sacred He[rald] . . . [broken off]” (*IvE* 985; early III century).
 17. “. . . of the First and Greatest metropolis of Asia and twice Temple-Warden of the Emperors, the city of the Ephesians, the State Council and the People honored Quintilia Varilla, Priestess of Artemis, daughter of P. Quintilius Valentus Varius who built all these works from his own funds for his fatherland” (*IvE* 986; early III century). (The building works was the extensive Varius bath complex.)
 18. “The State Council and People honor Mindia Menandra, daughter of Gaius Mindius Amoenus, who completed her term as Priestess of the goddess purely and generously . . .” (*IvE* 992; side A). (Side B is similar for a certain Claudia, but broken up.)
 19. “[Aurelia ??? Priestess of Arte]mis, completed her term of Priestess piously and with decorum, restored all the rites of the goddess and funded (them) in accord with ancient custom, daughter of M. Aur(elius) Hierokleos Apollinarius the emperor-honoring General, Market-Director, Council Chairman, father of the Priestess” (*IvE* 3059; II–III century).
 20. “Claudia Crateia Veriane [. . .] piously [. . . Priestess and *Kos*]meteira of the most pure Artemis, fulfilled her Priesthood worthily and piously, daughter to her father Claudius Metrobius Verianus, son of Claudius Metrobius and of Claudia Crateia High Priests, and to her mother Ulpia Demokratia the *Kosmeteira*. . .” (*IvE* 980). (This inscription goes on to list many of Claudia’s ancestors and relatives [including Julia Damiane Polla, Flavia Polla, and Julia Polla] who served as Priestesses and *Kosmeteirae*; see the genealogy given in the note to *IvE* 980.)

Let us make some general observations about the priestesses in this list before drawing a conclusion. First, it appears that this priesthood was an annual office with one priestess serving each year. This is indicated by the use of the aorist participle, ἱεροτεύουσα, rendered “completed her term as Priestess” (e.g. ##6–7), and is a standard kind of designation for fulfilling an annual priesthood. Hence, there does not appear to have been the “multitudes” of priestesses at the Artemisium as popularly thought. Certainly only 20 or so priestesses attested for a period of around 200 years does not indicate great hordes. And, as far as we can tell from all available sources, there were no other priestesses of Artemis Ephesia lurking in the background beyond these and the *Kosmeteira* indicted in a few cases on our list (e.g. #6).

Secondly, 19 of the 20 priestesses have Roman names (or a mixture of Roman and Greek names like Claudia Olympias in #7) including three who probably had Roman names because they were the daughters (##10, 19) or foster (step?) daughters (#11) of Roman citizens; only one has a purely Greek name, the Trallian, Kallinoe (#1) and she may have served before the Roman imperial period.

Although we cannot generalize too freely from Roman names alone about someone’s social status, in many cases with these priestesses, we do know enough about them from other places to safely conclude that they were the daughters of elite Ephesian families.³⁸ For example, the family names Polla, Hordeonia and Varius (##6, 13, 17 and 20) indicate that these are the daughters of the small circle of Ephesian families who occupied the highest municipal offices (e.g. Asiarch; cf. Acts 19:31) and even penetrated into the imperial stratum. Take P. Hordeonius Lollianus the Sophist as one instance (the father in #9). We know from elsewhere that Lollianus was a wealthy Ephesian (*IvE* 20A) who became the leading teacher of rhetoric and a high public official at Athens in roughly the time of Paul (Philostratus, *VS* 1.23).

Thirdly, all 19 of these priestesses with Roman names (granting the three probables) are named as the *daughters* of their parents and not as the *wives* of husbands. This might not be significant for modern women, but in ancient sources we have by this a highly reliable indication that these are unmarried girls, probably no older than 14 years old (after which they would normally be married), and perhaps younger.³⁹ For instance, married women are normally named like this on the inscriptions: “(The City honored) Pomponia Triaria, wife of [C.] Erucius Clarus, consul-governor of Judea, propraetor of the Lord Emperor M. Aurelius Antoninus, daughter of Junius Rufinus, proconsul of Asia” (*IvE* 665); or, “The Council and People honored Claudia Ammion, the wife of P. Gavius Capito the High Priest, who was appointed High Priestess of Asia because of both her own and her husband’s generosity” (*IvE* 681); or,

³⁸ The question of Roman names can easily lead into some technical questions; e.g. should we consider someone a Roman who does not evidence the full *tria nomina* and *tribus* (e.g. found in ##7–8, 13)? We have good evidence that we can in many cases, and we know some of the people here to be Roman citizens from other literary and epigraphical sources. In general, see A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford, 1979).

³⁹ Greek women were married between age 14 or 15 and men around age 30; women would live on average to about age 36 and men to about age 45; *q.v.* Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Families in Classical and Hellenistic Greece: Representations and Realities* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 5–7.

“This tomb and the outlying area belongs to Pomponia Faustina, *Kosmeteira* of Artemis (inherited) from her forebears, and to Menander her husband” (*IvE* 1655).⁴⁰ In some cases, both the woman’s own ancestry would be included if it were considered prestigious; e.g. “Laevia, daughter of Lucius Paula, the wife of Marcus Antonius Albus” (*IvE* 614B; early I AD). It should also be remembered that these honorary inscriptions represent the priestesses’ formal names, so it would have been insulting to leave reference to their husbands off the stones (who were technically their legal guardians [*kyrioi*]).

And finally, notice how we have the large sum of 5,000 denarii mentioned in four of the inscriptions (##7–8, 10–11) along with other “distributions” and benefactions. In one (#11) we learn that the Ephesian Council had established that the priestess of Artemis would donate this amount for the honor of serving in this office.⁴¹ Hence, as with most other Hellenic state priesthoods, we are certainly looking at a priesthood here which primarily involved serving “generously” (#7) as the real mark of piety, particularly when we keep in mind that annual priesthoods at Ephesus were “being sold, as it were, as if at auction” in Paul’s day (*IvE* 18C).⁴² Therefore, we necessarily have girls from wealthy and aristocratic families serving as priestesses of Artemis; no one else could afford the required expenses.⁴³

All of these observations from the data leads to one conclusion: the priestesses of Artemis Ephesia attested in ancient sources were definitely not cult prostitutes! It is impossible to read the evidence in this way, because Artemis’ priestesses were the young daughters of the most respectable families at Ephesus, who served the “pure” maiden goddess (#20) “with piety and decorum” (#6) and “purely” (#18).⁴⁴ The reference to “purity” in this context is an express reference to the *chaste* service of the virgin goddess which one typically finds in Greek sources.

As an example of the last point on purity, witness this dedication by a girl who passes from maidenhood into marriage.

Timarete, the daughter of Timaretos, before her wedding, has dedicated her tambourine, her pretty ball, the net that shielded her hair, her hair, and her girls’ dresses to Artemis of the Lake, a girl to a girl, as is fit. You, daughter of Leto, hold your hand over the child Timarete, and protect the pure girl in a pure way.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ There are exceptions, of course. For example: “Tiberia Cl(audia) Frontoniane, the most excellent mother of Fl(avius) Stasicleus Metrofanus of (Roman) senatorial rank, daughter of Cl(audius) Frontonianus the most generous [broken off]” (*IvE* 635B; but we know from elsewhere that her husband was T. Flavius Clitosthenes). But these are the exceptions.

⁴¹ The money would have paid for sacrificial animals (which were consumed in sacred public feasts), for the erection of the honorary statues and plaques whose inscriptions we are now reading, and for other cultic expenses (adornments for the statue of Artemis, wreaths for the shrine [#7], etc.).

⁴² Of course, there were also significant financial benefits associated with priesthoods. Priests received certain portions of sacrificial meats, the hides, etc. which they sold at market.

⁴³ Notice how various family members in #10 contributed the requisite sum for girl to serve as priestess of Artemis.

⁴⁴ And, it goes without saying, as Roman citizens, the girls would have been condemned by the senatorial decree which made prostitution a felony for Roman citizens (Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.85).

⁴⁵ From the *Greek Anthology* as given by John Oakley and Rebecca Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993) 14. The phrase “her girls’ dresses” may actually refer to “her dolls’ dresses.”

Dedications of this sort were part of the standard initiation of a Greek girl from childhood into adulthood—a process thought to be complete when she bore her first child. For a boy, since he usually married years later, his puberty initiation was marked by dedication of a lock of hair to Apollo and other kinds of rites (e.g. enrollment in the Ephebate and service in a chorus for religious festivals). But for Greek girls, since their entrance into puberty was usually celebrated by their marriage, both passages were simultaneous, and traditional marriage rituals for brides embodied this conception.⁴⁶

The above militates against any notion of temporary service as a cult prostitute for Greek girls as some initiation rite, which would make them unmarriageable! As evidence for this, recall that we noted Strabo's incredulity that men were actually willing to marry cult prostitutes in Armenia. Such would be inexplicable if it were common practice in Ephesus (which he visited) or elsewhere in the Greek world. In other words, we know quite a bit about initiation rites for Greek girls, and they related to marriage not to secret cult prostitution rites for which we have no direct or indirect evidence.

Furthermore, the priestesses we have discovered on the Ephesian inscriptions cannot be cult prostitutes even in our broader definition (i.e. payment for their services goes into the temple coffers). This is because such prostitutes would necessarily be slaves owned by the temple. It was not unusual for (secular!) *hetairai* to be owned by private individuals or by brothel owners—the latter practice was regarded as “base and unseemly by mankind” by the way (Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 14.14).⁴⁷ But the only girls we know as priestesses of Artemis of Ephesus were definitely not slaves! These were the young daughters of Ephesian aristocrats. To interpret these girls as cult prostitutes is analogous with confusing the daughter of an old and wealthy Boston family with a poor stripper in a seedy waterfront bar.⁴⁸

In Chariton's romantic novel of the Syracusan beauty, Callirhoe, we read that the women of the city were going to a public feast of Aphrodite. Yet of the girl, he says, “Callirhoe had not been seen in public before, but at Eros' prompting, her mother led her out to reverence the goddess” (*Callirhoe* 1.1.5). When we read that an upper class, teen or pre-teen Greek girl served as a priestess, it probably represented her first introduction into society, and she would have been closely chaperoned by attendants. Otherwise, as Ischomachus tells Socrates regarding his young bride's prior training in household management: “Why, what knowledge could she have had, Socrates, when I took her for my wife? She was not yet fifteen years old when she came to me, and up to that time she had lived in leading-strings, seeing, hearing and saying as little as possible” (Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 7.5; LCL trans.). It was never the custom for free Greek girls to be allowed out of the *oikos* without careful supervision, much less to be prostituted!

⁴⁶ Cf. Burkert, *Greek Religion* 260–264.

⁴⁷ In addition, household slave-girls (and sometimes boys) often had to perform sexual favors for their masters; see again Glancy, “Obstacles to Slaves' Participation.”

⁴⁸ The prurient and shocking gossip about the wife of Claudius in Juvenal's raunchy sixth satire notwithstanding!

A skeptical reader, however, could object that the honorary inscriptions which we have provided cannot be expected to have recorded intimate details of secret mystery rites associated with Artemis Ephesia. My answer is three-fold: (1) Artemis of Ephesus in Pauline Ephesus was a state goddess cast in the form of the classic virgin huntress. No mystery initiation rites of any sort in her worship are known, nor is she regarded as a mystery deity by any competent modern or ancient authority. How then can we posit such secret rites without any evidence? (2) Even if we imagine that “sacred sexual union” was practiced by the “pure” girl-priestesses in honor of “the most pure Virgin” (!), this is not *cult prostitution* in either our narrow or broad definition. It would be something else. (3) One would be surprised at the sorts of things which appear explicitly or can be deduced by careful study of the Greek (and a few Latin) inscriptions from Ephesus. Sale of priesthoods, superintendence of the state cult of Artemis Ephesia by the city fathers, public slaves buying and raising their own slaves on Artemis’s tab, Artemis as the classic Greek virgin goddess—all these sorts of things are known—but not cult prostitution or sexual rites of any sort in Artemis’s cult. As Dieter Knibbe, one of the foremost scholars on ancient Ephesus, says: “How much do we know about the cult of Artemis [of Ephesus]? As I said in the beginning, her worship was not very much different from that of other deities in pagan cults.”⁴⁹

Our skeptical reader could then ask whether there were not hordes of slave-prostitutes in the goddess’s service who have gone unmentioned in the sources dug up by archaeologists. The short answer is a confident, “No.” We have quite a bit of tangential evidence which makes this clear. First, we have a relatively complete picture of who was involved in the sacred service of Artemis, which I have sketched out elsewhere.⁵⁰ No cult prostitutes are in evidence. Secondly, Artemidorus of Ephesus states that *hetairai* were forbidden entrance into the temple of Artemis Ephesia.⁵¹ This is inconsistent with them being in Artemis’s service. And finally, in Achilles Tatius’s *Clitophon* novel (8.8), one of the characters declares that the day’s events—the heroine, Leucippe, who was falsely charged with being a slave and a harlot, had fled for refuge to the inner shrine in the Artemisium—had virtually made the house of Artemis into a brothel, the very suggestion of which was obviously horrifying and beyond all shame.⁵² This is not consistent if there were cult prostitution going on there!

V. CONCLUSION

Despite the received opinion to the contrary, I do not believe that cult prostitution was practiced in Greek (and Roman) regions of the NT era. The

⁴⁹ Knibbe, “Via Sacra Ephesiaca” 153.

⁵⁰ Baugh, “A Foreign World” 22–28.

⁵¹ Quoted by Oster, “The Ephesian Artemis” 28, n. 37. As I mentioned above, *hetairai* would not have been welcome in any Greek state cult rites which were confined to the citizens of that city and to their families as a rule.

⁵² The whole episode occurs in books 7–8 of Tatius’s novel and would well repay the time spent reading it over.

evidence thought to support this institution in the cities of Corinth and Ephesus was found wanting in our brief survey of Strabo and a few other authors. Finally, we looked at some of the positive evidence from Ephesus to show that the priestesses of Artemis—wrongly thought by many today to be a fertility or mother goddess—were no more than daughters of noble families, whose terms of office involved them in the honorary public roles and the financial obligations which typified priestly offices in Greek state cults. A priestess of Artemis compares better with a Rose Bowl queen or with Miss Teen America than with a cult prostitute. Indeed, there are some hints in the literature (e.g. Xenophon of Ephesus) that the girl-priestesses may have been chosen because they best resembled the chaste maiden-goddess.

Hopefully Ephesian cult prostitutes will soon disappear from our literature and from our pulpits, for these chimera exist only in the minds of people today, not in the past. This is particularly desirable, since the issue has moved beyond the realm of purely historical accuracy into that of ecclesiastical controversies over women's ordination; indeed, the false notion of Ephesian cult prostitutes is a central prop for a radical reinterpretation of 1 Tim 2:9–15 which must now be given serious reexamination.